



Q I hear there's a new version of Google Desktop Search. What's the difference?

A You heard right. There's a beta version of the new Desktop Search (version 2.0) available from Google's website at <http://desktop.google.com>. The new version indexes your files and Outlook emails in the same way as the previous version, so you can quickly search your desktop PC from Google's homepage.

However, the new version introduces a new Sidebar (pictured right). This introduces a range of tools including weather reports, a scratch pad for taking notes, news and emails. There's also a quick-search bar, which looks through your PC and the internet as you start typing in a search term. The Sidebar can be removed if you find it gets in the way or you don't want it.



Q I've started seeing RSS buttons on websites. I've heard that they have something to do with live news, but what are they and how do they work?

A Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary (RSS) is a method for websites to push headlines and tasters of new articles to those that subscribe. Sites that have it usually display an orange RSS button. Our website (www.computershopper.co.uk) has an RSS button on the news page.

If you click on this button, you'll see lots of code appear on the screen, with some readable headlines and text in the middle. Your browser won't know what to do with it, but an RSS reader does. You can download a free reader for your computer from www.rssreader.nl. This installs a small application.

First, note down the address of the feed (www.computershopper.co.uk/RSS). Next you have to register for a feed. From RSS Reader select 'Add channel/feed' and type in the address you noted down earlier. You're now subscribed to our news feed and will be notified of new stories without having to visit our homepage.

You can add feeds from other websites in a similar way, and keep track of all your favourite sites automatically.

Firefox supports RSS feeds without the need for a separate reader. Click on Bookmarks and Manage bookmarks. Click on File and New Livemark and enter the RSS feed's address. The Bookmark menu will show you the latest articles posted for that site.

david@computershopper.co.uk

REVIEW VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE

SONY Vegas Movie Studio +DVD 6

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £75 inc VAT

Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £99 inc VAT

SUPPLIER SCV London 020 8418 1470

DETAILS www.sonymediasoftware.com



Vegas Movie Studio was for many years the most powerful, stable and easy-to-use video-editing software aimed at home users. That changed with the arrival of Adobe Premiere Elements in late 2004. Movie Studio was the slicker of the two and its DVD authoring was far superior, but Premiere Elements had a clear lead in terms of editing power.

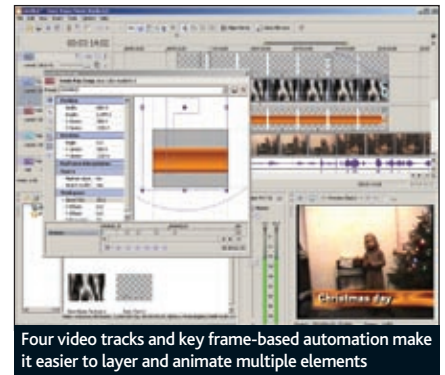
Sony's response is Movie Studio 6. Rather than being developed from the previous version, Sony has cut a few advanced features out of its flagship Vegas 6 editor. The result is a vast improvement over Movie Studio 4 (there was no version 5, presumably to synchronise version numbers with Vegas) with a mass of powerful new features.

Movie Studio 4 included Start and End settings for effects, which allowed settings to change over time. In version 6, this is replaced by key frame automation, so users can define settings at multiple points in a clip and morph between them with options such as Linear, Smooth and Hold. The video and audio track counts increase from three to four each, allowing for more complex montages. Four isn't as impressive as Premiere Elements' unlimited tracks, but it's plenty for most jobs.

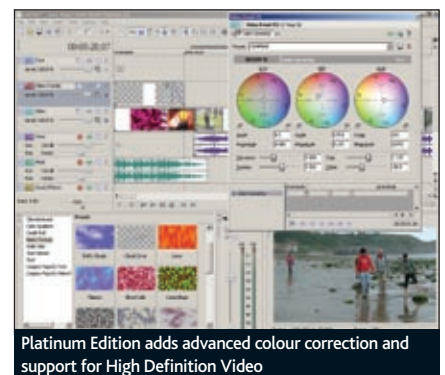
It's now easy to spot when video and audio has lost sync – and easy to fix it. Video and audio can be reversed, and a new Noise Texture tool generates attractive, amorphous abstract patterns. There's support for ASIO sound cards, VST and DirectX audio plug-ins and multi-processor PCs. The interface can be rearranged to spread over two monitors, and the software can output previews as a Digital Video (DV) stream for monitoring on a TV via a DV camera. The only disappointment is that the button for quickly toggling full-resolution previews has disappeared; this was quite handy for most people with a single monitor.

LET'S BUILD

DVD Architect Studio, which comes bundled in the package, was already in a different league to the DVD authoring facilities included with other sub-£100 video-editing programs, but version 3 leaves the competition for dust. It supports playlists for creating alternative orders of videos on a disc, ideal for adding a Play All option. End actions tell DVD players what to do at the end of a video clip or menu. You can even prohibit specific remote control buttons in a menu or video. All that separates it from authoring software that costs hundreds of pounds is the lack of support for subtitles, surround sound or multiple audio and video streams for alternate languages and camera angles.



Four video tracks and key frame-based automation make it easier to layer and animate multiple elements



Platinum Edition adds advanced colour correction and support for High Definition Video

DVD Architect Studio's new features make the software a bit more intimidating for new users than before. Basic tasks are still easy to achieve, but some features that were well sign-posted before are a little harder to find. However, the new tutorials, which literally point out what needs clicking for various tasks, should keep beginners on track.

GOING PLATINUM

Platinum Edition is a new addition to the Vegas family. It is essentially Vegas Movie Studio with support for High Definition Video (HDV) cameras and footage. HDV offers a massive quality jump over MiniDV; within a couple of years, it'll probably be the standard domestic camcorder format. The only problem is that HDV significantly increases demands on the PC; previewing video with effects is jerky, even on a fast PC.

There are other benefits that make Platinum Edition a good choice. The best of these is the Colour Corrector effect, which is vastly more powerful than the standard version's various colour filters. Some extra transitions, sound effects and Acid XMC, Sony's entry-level music-making program, are also included.

The Vegas range has always been a delight to use, and with this update Movie Studio no longer feels underpowered compared to Premiere Elements. The standard version is a superb package, but the Platinum Edition's HDV support and advanced colour correction make it perfect for those with high aspirations.

Ben Pitt

✓ Lots of powerful new features puts Movie Studio back on top for affordable video production

✗ DVD Architect Studio may be a little bewildering for inexperienced users

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, (2.8GHz, 512MB recommended for HDV), 200MB disk space. **Product codes** Movie Studio +DVD 6: SVMSDV6000; Platinum Edition: SPVMSDV6000

REVIEW STUDY SOFTWARE**MICROSOFT Student 2006**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £51 inc VAT

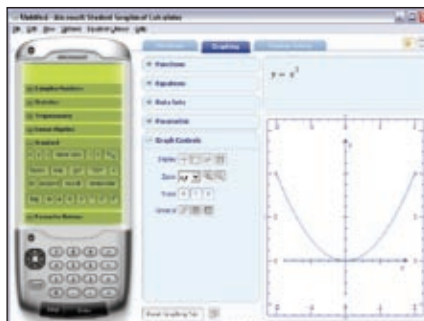
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.microsoft.com/student

Anyone upgrading from the 2005 to the 2006 edition of Microsoft Encarta Premium might notice a couple of things missing. One is £10 from the price; the other is the suite of 'homework help' tools designed to help students make best use of the encyclopedia for their schoolwork. Microsoft hasn't just ditched the tools, though – it has used them as the basis for yet another Encarta spin-off called Student 2006.

Aimed at students between 12 and 18, Student 2006 still includes a full copy of Encarta 2006 (albeit the Reference Library edition), but it presents it in a way tailored specifically for school studies. The traditional and children's Encarta interfaces are still there, but a new student-specific interface organises encyclopedia content into subject areas to suit the UK curriculum.

The list of subjects doesn't quite tally with that of the National Curriculum and some subjects are missing, most notably RE. Many of the resources for each subject are just direct links to Encarta articles, though, and a search toolbar makes finding an unlisted item straightforward enough.

Homework help is a fairly open remit, and Student 2006 tries to meet it by including features



Microsoft Student 2006's graphical calculator is powerful and one of the application's best tools

over and above those contained in Encarta itself. English students are particularly well served; there are just over a hundred literature guides for classic and modern novels, plus a dozen or so project starters that give tips on writing anything from an advertisement to a play.

The rest of the humanities get the full multimedia treatment, too, but the sciences come up short. Just over 20 pop science videos from the Discovery Channel are a token gesture for biology, chemistry and physics, but maths just gets a list of unexplained commonly used equations, and health and sports education barely gets a mention, with just a list of results for notable sporting events.

In addition to the Encarta-based components, Student 2006 also includes a set of learning essentials. The bulk of this consists of a comprehensive selection of templates for Microsoft Office programs. These are mostly excellent and include slick presentations, written reports and tables for a variety of subjects.

Some, however, are less useful. The scraps of cartoon-style clip-art for creating "fun and exciting diagrams" for biology, chemistry and physics are an affront to art, let alone science. Several useful click-through tutorials on using various Office features are provided, but the box's mention of "toolbars [to] help students create high-quality reports and presentations" is a bit misleading, since they're simply features already found in Office, and all Student 2006 does is simply draw attention to them.

A graphical calculator rounds off the package. If mathematicians have been poorly served so far, this goes a long way to make up for it. This can plot graphs in both two and three dimensions, solves simultaneous equations and does quite a bit more besides. Better still, tool tips explain what every function does when the mouse pointer is held over a button.

Despite the odd misgiving, Student 2006 is good value, although whether the extra features are worth the £20 premium over the standard Encarta 2006 Reference Library edition depends on whether or not you have Microsoft Office. If not, Office XP Standard will set you back another £80, which makes the free OpenOffice and online Wikipedia encyclopedia rather more attractive.

Julian Prokaza

✓ Study-specific content; excellent graphical calculator

✗ Needs Microsoft Office; some subjects get short shrift

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000 or XP, 1GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 850MB disk space. **Part code** B0009XE2AC

HOTLIST OFFICE SUITE**ABILITY SOFTWARE Ability Office 4**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Professional Edition £50 inc VAT

(upgrade £25); Standard/Small Business

Edition £40 inc VAT (upgrade £20)

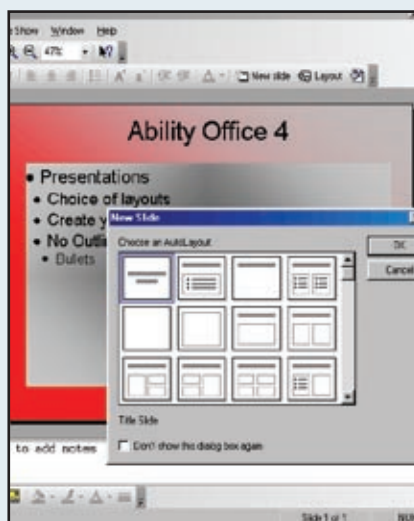
DETAILS www.ability.com

Buying an office suite doesn't necessarily mean spending a lot of money, as Ability shows us with its Office 4 suite. For just £50 for the Professional Edition, it undercuts the competition by a mile but still offers a functional package.

The latest version introduces the new Presentation program, which competes against Microsoft's PowerPoint. It's compatible with its competitor, bar a couple of features such as embedded video. This means that a few PowerPoint presentations won't open properly in Ability and you'll have to start your work from scratch. To facilitate this, Ability offers 20 slide layouts for slideshows.

The other big feature is Ability Mail. It's not included on the CD, but is available as a free download from the Ability website for registered users. It's the final piece in the puzzle for moving away from a Microsoft-based productivity suite.

Ability Office 4 also updates Ability Database. One of the strengths of the suite, the database



now provides easier form design and reporting. Ability Write has the welcome additions of Autocorrect, Autotext and Grammar Checker. These features put the application on a par with Microsoft Word.

For the price it's very good value, although we recommend downloading the trial version to make sure all the features you need are present.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP, Pentium processor, 64MB RAM, 100MB disk space

HOTLIST VOICE-TO-TEXT SOFTWARE**SPINVOX Voice Powered Text**

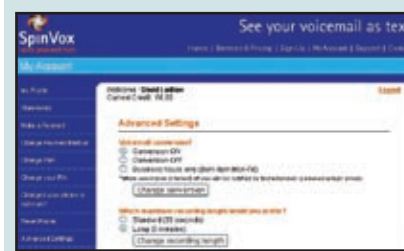
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £5 per month for 20 messages

DETAILS www.spinvox.com

If you think that voicemail is an annoying way to receive messages, you'll love Spinvox's Voice Powered Text. This software converts all your voice messages to text files and sends them to you via SMS or email. The conversion is accurate and easy to follow. The basic £5 per month service should suit most people, but there are more expensive plans available for people who regularly receive more messages than this.

REQUIREMENTS Mobile phone and contract; internet connection to manage account online





REVIEW PC RECOVERY

INVOLUTION
RecoverPC

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £100 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.halcyonics.co.ukDETAILS www.recoverpc.com

Windows System Restore is a godsend for people who don't make backups on a regular basis – which is probably most of us. Even serious problems can be brushed aside in a few minutes, as long as the PC can boot into Windows and there's a suitable Restore Point from which to work. If not, you're stuffed.

That's where RecoverPC comes in. Manufacturer Involution claims this little gadget can protect a PC against all software problems, including a non-working Windows installation, and that it works its magic in an instant.

RecoverPC consists of a tiny PCI card that looks like a mutated DIMM. There isn't much to see, since most of the card is covered by a metal plate that Involution describes as a "thermal and impact resistant heat shield". Unless you plan on putting your PC through orbital re-entry, though, the plate is only good for hiding the handful of chips.

Once fitted, RecoverPC requisitions a number of hard disk sectors for its own use almost as soon as the PC is switched on. It uses anything between 100MB to 4GB worth, depending on the capacity of the drive. The sectors are marked as 'unavailable', which means they're strictly off limits to all

applications, partitioning tools and low-level formatting utilities; hard disk controllers use the same technique to prevent sectors of a hard disk with physical defects being used.

RecoverPC uses these sectors to store a baseline – a snapshot of the current logical state of the drive – as well as any further changes to the drive's contents.

Armed with this information, RecoverPC uses it to restore a PC back to the working baseline state

when a problem occurs. The difference between it and Windows System Restore is that the PC doesn't need a working Windows installation for the recovery to happen. RecoverPC has its own BIOS that pops up the recovery options before it looks for an operating system to boot.

RecoverPC is activated by pressing a key combination at boot time, or it can be set to restore a drive automatically after a set number of days, or even upon every reboot. True to Involution's word, the restore process is near instant, regardless of its scale. We deleted our test PC's primary NTFS partition and created a new FAT32 one in its place, and RecoverPC undid the damage in a couple of seconds.

RecoverPC is only as good as its baseline, and there's only one baseline at that, so ensure that it's taken when the PC is in a pristine state. You can update the baseline at any time, such as when you've installed a new application and you're sure that it's working properly.

Despite being ideal for a PC that's prone to regular catastrophic changes, RecoverPC is no substitute for a good backup. It works only on a PC's system partition, and you'll need to store your documents on a different, non-monitored partition if you want to stop them being wiped out by a rollback.

Julian Prokaza

✓ Idiot-proof hard disk restoration

✗ Only works on the system partition; no substitute for a backup

REQUIREMENTS Free PCI slot. **Product code** 5060094150000

HOTLIST ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE

F-SECURE
Anti-Virus 2005

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £26 inc VAT

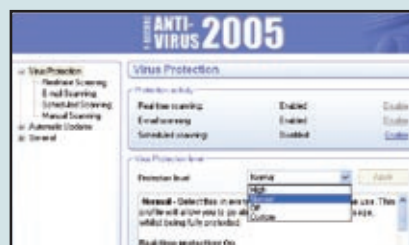
SUPPLIER F-Secure 01223 478800

DETAILS www.f-secure.com

One of the cheapest anti-virus products on the market, F-Secure's Anti-Virus is also one of the best. Its interface is clean and easy to use, and when we downloaded infected emails its pop-up listed the viruses but didn't halt the rest of the download.

With excellent detection across the board, it's great value for money and worthy of our Best Buy award.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium II processor, 128MB RAM, 30MB disk space



HOTLIST DTP SOFTWARE

SERIF
PagePlus 10

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £100 inc VAT; £50 upgrade

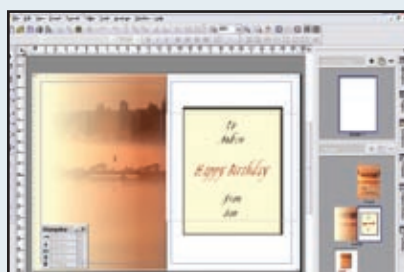
from any Serif product

SUPPLIER Serif 08003 767070

DETAILS www.serif.com

Serif's PagePlus 10 is aimed at the consumer who doesn't need the complexity of Adobe's InDesign. The latest version is even easier to use and allows anyone to create professional-looking publications. The price is similar to that of Microsoft's Publisher, but this product remains our favourite.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium processor, 256MB RAM, 300MB disk space. **Product code** B0002TSZ2Y



HOTLIST MUSIC PRODUCTION SOFTWARE

ABLETON
Live 5

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £299 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dv247.comDETAILS www.ableton.com

Ableton Live is an extraordinary piece of software, designed to help you produce your live performance. Its excellent Session View lets you trigger recorded clips on the fly, making the software more of an instrument than a recording platform. If you plan to perform on stage, there's no better choice than Live.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 600MHz processor, 512MB RAM. **Product code** 28683





REVIEW WEB DESIGN SOFTWARE

MACROMEDIA
Dreamweaver 8

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £400 inc VAT

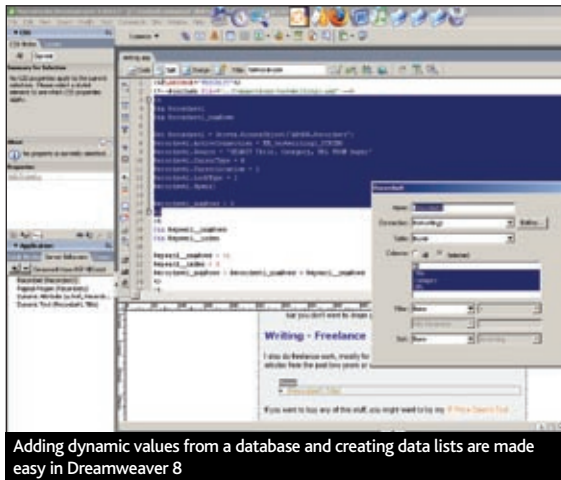
SUPPLIER Macromedia Direct 0131 458 6766

DETAILS www.macromedia.com

Anyone who has used Dreamweaver MX or MX 2004 will feel instantly at home with this latest version. Like previous incarnations, Dreamweaver 8 offers a choice of three workspace layouts: one for designers who want to edit layout and content visually, one for programmers who want to type the code themselves and one that allows you to view both design and code simultaneously. Windows on the left and bottom of the screen give access to regularly used tools, properties and information.

The most obvious change lies in one of these docked windows. Dreamweaver 8 uses a single, revamped CSS window rather than the two present in earlier versions. It has two tabs, allowing you to view information on CSS properties applicable to the currently selected item or the document as a whole. It's easy to tweak values as well as add new classes, and you can quickly export or link to an external stylesheet.

Dreamweaver 8 also introduces some clever tools for designers who want to build page layouts using CSS rather than tables or frames. Clicking on a <div> area in layout view brings up highlighting and a tool tip showing its ID and class along with layout values such as alignment, margins and



Adding dynamic values from a database and creating data lists are made easy in Dreamweaver 8

padding. A new option in the View menu allows you to view the document as it will appear in different CSS media types such as screen, handheld or print, or on a device that renders no CSS styles at all.

Rulers have been added to the design view, making it easier to position <div> elements accurately, and a new zoom function allows you to get closer to the page to examine complicated layouts. Zooming in increases the size of the tracing image, which is handy if you're working from a comp, but we were disappointed that this zoom wasn't activated by the mouse wheel.

Those who prefer to do some or all their design work by editing code will also notice small but thoughtful changes in this new version. Most obvious is a thin toolbar running down the side of the code window. This allows you to toggle visual

aids such as line numbering and invalid syntax highlighting, as well as adjusting code indents. A new commenting tool allows you to quickly disable or re-enable a block of code; this is handy when debugging scripts. You can also hide sections of code that you're not working on by selecting them as a block and clicking the small minus icon that appears.

Dreamweaver remains one of the best visual tools for those who want to add dynamic data elements to web pages. This version supports ASP, ASP.NET, JSP and PHP, including PHP5. Database connections can be added without the need to type connection strings manually, and it's easy to add dynamic values and repeated areas. A

Live Data View lets you see how your page will look when populated with information from a database.

Dreamweaver 8 is an update consisting of small improvements rather than revolutionary changes, but it reasserts Dreamweaver's status as the best professional web design tool on the market. It's too expensive for most home users, but if web design is your profession it's £400 well spent.

Tom Royal

✓ Improved CSS interface; still the best professional web design package available

✗ Not a revolutionary update over the previous version; too expensive for most home users

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 650MB disk space, 1,024x768 pixel display

HOTLIST CREATIVE & DESIGN SOFTWARE

ADOBE
Creative Suite 2

RATING ★★★★★

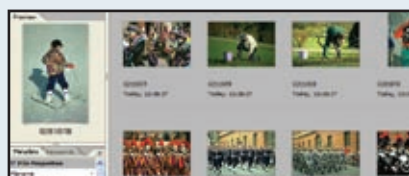
PRICE Standard edition £786 inc VAT (upgrade £375); Premium edition £1,040 inc VAT (upgrade £500)

SUPPLIER Adobe 0131 458 6842

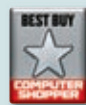
DETAILS www.adobe.co.uk

Creative Suite 2 is a superb bundle of high-end products, including Photoshop, InDesign and Live Trace. Each product's features complement each other and they are all neatly tied together under a single interface. Each application also features a range of new tools such as Photoshop's Vanishing Point tool, which makes photo editing in perspective much easier. This suite is great value compared to the standalone products.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000 or XP with QuickTime 6.5, 500MHz processor (1GHz recommended), 384MB RAM (1GB recommended), 2.5GB disk space



HOTLIST VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE

ADOBE
Premiere Elements

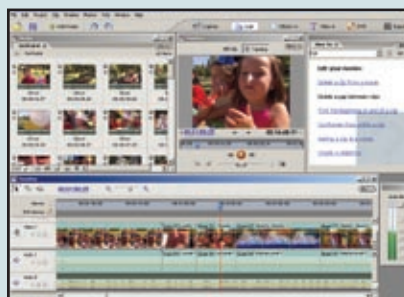
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £53 inc VAT

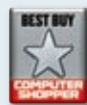
SUPPLIER www.savastore.comDETAILS www.adobe.co.uk

Premiere Elements is a cut-down version of the professional Premiere Pro video-editing application. It offers many of the same tools, and it's a powerful editing package. It is leagues ahead of other cheap editors and well worth buying if you have a DV camera and want to turn your footage into something special.

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP with SP1, 800MHz Pentium III or Athlon XP, 256MB RAM, 1.2GB disk space. **Product code** 25530008



HOTLIST HOSTING PACKAGE

1AND1
Microsoft Home

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £5.86 per month, £70 a year

DETAILS www.1and1.co.uk

If you want to run a website above and beyond the simple web space that you get with your ISP, you'll need a dedicated hosting package such as 1and1's Microsoft Home. You get 800MB of web space, 10GB of data transfers a month, a free .co.uk domain name and 300 email addresses. This web hosting pack, with its simple control panel and bundled scripts, is excellent value.

REQUIREMENTS Internet access, web browser





REVIEW MUSIC NOTATION SOFTWARE

SIBELIUS SOFTWARE

Sibelius 4

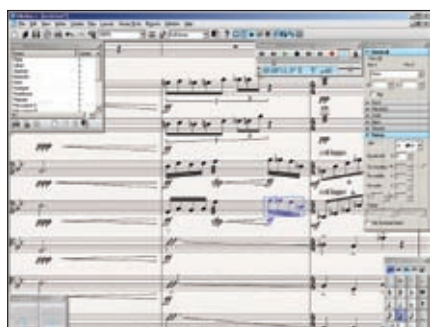
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £595 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Sibelius Software 0800 458 3111

DETAILS www.sibelius.com

We reviewed Sibelius 3 in *What's New*, October 2004, and found it to be a powerful music notation tool. Its presentation of even the most complex music was neat and attractive, it was easy to learn, fast to use and its scope for customisation was seemingly inexhaustible. It was hard to imagine the developers could improve upon it. However, while version 4's core features remain pleasingly familiar, Sibelius Software has found ways to speed up the use of its eponymous software and has added some

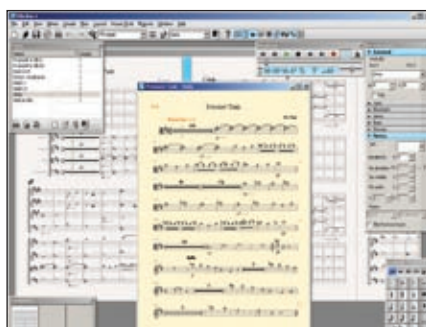


Sibelius manages to present complex rhythms clearly, and has excellent support for modern scoring practices

impressive new features for those working in education and writing music for picture.

The Dynamic Parts feature alone makes version 4 worth the upgrade. All notation software makes it easy to extract and print individual parts for performers to play from, but now extracted parts remain linked to the full score. Editing the score affects the parts, and vice versa, but each can be formatted differently, perhaps to allow for page turns or cues in the parts. A new floating window allows the formatting of one part to be applied to others, and an entire set of parts can be printed with a single click. Dynamic Parts isn't just a great idea; it's also superbly implemented, keeping scores and parts linked yet independently editable.

Version 3 integrated a Native Instruments software synthesiser for score playback without the need to configure a separate synth. Version 4 builds on this with a playback window for sequencer-style score navigation and playback, plus a video window for composing to picture. QuickTime, Windows



Dynamic Parts saves time when preparing parts for individual performers

Media and MPEG video is supported. Moving the slider on the playback window moves a marker across the score and scrubs through the video. This is fantastic for orchestrators working in TV and film.

Teachers will love the Worksheet Creator. This comprises over 1,700 education exercises and templates ranging from simple theory and aural tests to creative tasks such as composing in a specific type of scale. The library is well presented and includes projects relating to Key Stage 3 and GCSE syllabuses. Other new features run well into double figures, and include a new music font, more keyboard shortcuts and the ability to copy a section of score to the clipboard as a graphic for importing into a word processor or image editor.

The downside of such a sophisticated product is the inevitable expense. For anyone who produces scores as part of their job, it's an essential purchase (or £163 upgrade). But for the average jazz or function band leader, £595 is a lot of beer money to shell out. Still, Sibelius 3 was available for around £450 from retailers, so hopefully the same deals will soon become available for version 4. Meanwhile, schools are eligible for education discounts and site licences. And even at its full price, whether score production is your job or just your passion, Sibelius 4 is money well spent.

Ben Pitt

✓ Produces attractive scores in record time; superb new teaching materials and video support

✗ Too expensive for the average semi-professional musician

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP, Pentium processor, 192MB RAM, 250MB disk space. Also available for Mac OS

HOTLIST REMOTE CONTROL SOFTWARE

3AM LABS

LogMeIn



RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Free; Professional edition

\$13 (around £7) per month

SUPPLIER www.3amlabs.comDETAILS www.logmein.com

If you have ever needed to access your PC while you've been away, LogMeIn is just the software for you. The free version gives you full remote control of your PC over the internet and works brilliantly.

The Professional version adds support for file transfers and guest invitations and lets you use email to send links to files on your PC. It's an excellent piece of software for anyone who does a lot of remote work.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Internet Explorer, broadband internet connection



HOTLIST WEB BROWSER

MOZILLA

Firefox 1.0

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Free

SUPPLIER www.firefox.com

Firefox 1.0 is by far the best web browser we've ever used. Introducing advanced features such as tabbed browsing and support for RSS feeds, it is leaps and bounds ahead of Internet Explorer. When you also consider that it's better at rendering pages and is more secure, there's little excuse not to use it.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 500MHz Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 52MB disk space



HOTLIST UTILITIES SUITE

SYMANTEC

SystemWorks 2005

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £45 inc VAT

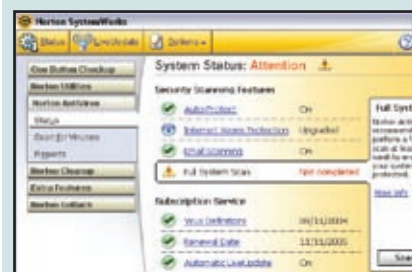
SUPPLIER Symantec 01628 592222

DETAILS www.symantec.co.uk

Keeping your PC running properly is a difficult task made a lot easier by SystemWorks. A One Button Checkup feature gives your PC a thorough examination and fixes any problems it comes across.

With Norton AntiVirus to protect your PC and GoBack 4.0 to make regular backups, PC woes can be fixed quickly and efficiently.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 180MB disk space, IE 5.5 or above. Product code B0002TS22Y





REVIEW SECURITY SOFTWARE

UTIMACO
SafeGuard Easy 4.10

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £95 inc VAT

DETAILS www.utmico.com

The cost of a PC usually pales into insignificance compared to the value of the data it contains. A backup is the best way to keep files safe, but it won't keep your data away from sticky-fingered users. For that, you need some form of encryption, but finding a product that's easy to manage and relatively transparent is no mean feat. SafeGuard Easy claims to offer just that, though.

It can encrypt up to four hard disks, or one or more partitions using a range of algorithms, including AES, IDEA and Blowfish; external storage devices such as USB flash drives are also supported. Passwords aren't stored on the disk, which means that brute force is the only way for an unauthorised user to get at an encrypted disk's contents.

Getting SafeGuard up and running holds no surprises, although the installation process would benefit from a little more explanation. As it stands, you're presented with a dialog box of options with no explanation. While the PDF manual makes things clearer, its fragmented structure forces you to cross-reference several chapters before you can proceed.

The encryption process begins after a reboot. This can take some time, but you can leave it running in the background and use the PC as normal. From then on, SafeGuard Easy is transparent. You need to enter a username and password before you can boot the PC – the boot partition is encrypted by default – and encryption and decryption is done on the fly. SafeGuard Easy also replaces Windows XP's login screen with its own, but keeps the same username and password. If you don't have a password set up you don't need one to bypass the login screen, which means the encrypted hard disk is just as easy to access as an unencrypted one.

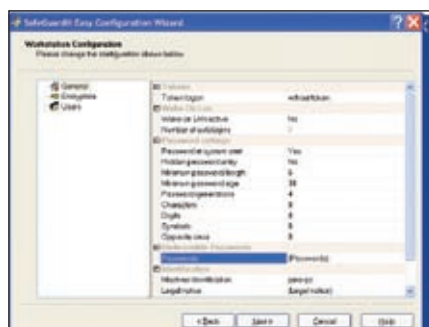
If you have a password in place, though, SafeGuard is a useful way of protecting your data. However, it is a little expensive.

Julian Prokaza

✓ Strong, transparent disk encryption

✗ Setup could be more user-friendly; pricy

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000 or XP, Intel Pentium or equivalent processor, 128MB RAM, 25MB disk space. **Product code** 73P4683



Setup is reasonably straightforward, although a little more explanation would be nice

REVIEW WIFI SOFTWARE

JIWIRE
SpotLock

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Free; \$5 a month (£3) for security

DETAILS www.jiwire.com

Windows XP's Wireless Zero Configuration (WZC) wizard does a good job of detecting and connecting to wireless networks, but it's basic. If you want a little more from your connection software and more security, JiWire's SpotLock could be what you're looking for.

This free utility helps you connect to wireless networks in much the same way as the WZC, and is just as simple to use. However, once you choose a network it goes one step further. Its configuration wizard lets you choose a range of options to perform every time you connect to that network. These include joining a Virtual Private Network (VPN), running an application of your choice and disabling Internet Explorer's proxy server settings, which can cause problems if you're connecting to a wireless hotspot.

SpotLock also has a built-in hotspot locator. Just select the country, city and postcode you're in and the software brings up a list of available hotspots, both charged-for and free.

Where SpotLock proves to be most useful is in protecting your connection with the SpotLock Security option. This paid-for subscription service encrypts all your internet traffic at the touch of button or automatically when you connect to a wireless network. The encrypted traffic is routed to JiWire's servers, so nobody at the hotspot can see what you're doing. It also relays all your mail messages through JiWire's email servers without you having to change your Outlook settings. Sending data through JiWire's servers adds a bit of lag, but it's still quick to browse the internet.

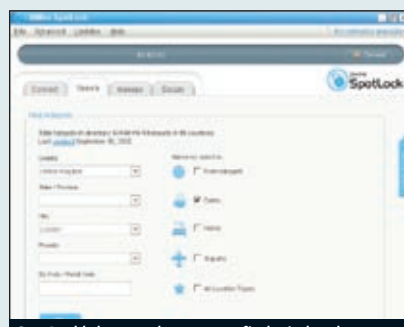
The free version of SpotLock is a useful tool if you visit a lot of hotspots, but frequent users who are worried about privacy can add the inexpensive security services easily. If you're not a hotspot user, though, you may as well stick with Microsoft's WZC.

David Ludlow

✓ Easy to use; good value

✗ Won't secure a wired connection

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP, 50MB disk space, WiFi adaptor



SpotLock's hotspot locator can find wireless hotspots all over the world

REVIEW DISC-BURNING SUITE

CYBERLINK
DVD Solution 4

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £63 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.softwarewarehouse.bizDETAILS www.gocyberlink.com

It's only a few months since we reviewed DVD Solution 3 (*What's New*, March 2005), and already a new version is upon us. We found version 3 was mostly good but had a few flaws, so we're delighted to see that most complaints have been addressed.

The disc-burning application now supports two-layer DVD media and the CD-Extra format for combining audio and data on a CD. PowerDVD 5 has been upgraded to PowerDVD 6, the latest version of CyberLink's excellent DVD-Video playback software. There's also a new label printing utility, the only notable absence from version 3.

There are plenty of other improvements, too: PowerDirector Express, the video-editing program, now has the Magic tools we described in our review of PowerDirector last month. PowerProducer, the DVD authoring program, now supports DVD-VR on top of the DVD+VR support previously included, allowing users to edit DVD Video discs created on DVD-RW as well as DVD+RW media.

However, DVD Solution 4 is marred by a few annoyances. During installation, it sneaked MusicMatch Jukebox on to our PC, which promptly assigned itself as our default program for playing audio CDs. Every single program and utility asked to be registered each time we loaded it; why not just have one registration routine? PowerDVD 6 has some interesting new features, but this version supports only stereo playback, while the version with DVD Solution 3 – which was automatically uninstalled – supported surround sound.

DVD Solution does have plenty of good points. We like its backup tool and its image editor, both of which are unchanged since the previous version. However, compared to Nero Reloaded it's awkward, at times annoying, and over £25 more expensive.

Ben Pitt

✓ A well-chosen collection of mostly decent programs

✗ Not as polished as Nero; comparatively expensive

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP, Pentium 4 2.2GHz (for all features), 128MB RAM (256MB recommended), 10GB disk space (for DVD projects). **Product code** 300030457



DVD Solution comprises a range of media-creation and disc-burning programs



REVIEW BACKUP SOFTWARE

ACRONIS
True Image 8

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £34 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.acronis.com

Disk-imaging programs such as Acronis True Image make copies of your PC's hard disk, turning an entire partition into a single, large file. Traditionally you'd have to run such programs from a boot CD or use them within Windows, after which the program would shut down the operating system before starting to copy the file. True Image works while you are running Windows and allows you to continue working as it makes the partition copies.

True Image 8 can also create incremental backups of partitions, saving only the changes that have occurred since the previous backup. A full backup of a Windows partition might create a 10GB backup file. An incremental backup saves all the changes made since the full backup, resulting in a much smaller file.

The program can also create a bootable rescue CD that contains all the software you need to back up or restore your disk without Windows. It supports a wide range of CD, DVD, USB and FireWire drives, as well as Windows network shared folders. It's easy to use, and is essential if your disk breaks down and you want to restore a backup of Windows.

Unfortunately, we didn't find True Image to be reliable, which is an issue that also appears on the company's technical support forums. It's not clear whether the fault lies with memory modules, USB hard disks or True Image, but users have had problems creating large image files. We found many of our backups were corrupt. Regardless of where the fault lies, it's concerning when a backup program doesn't warn you automatically when it has created backup files that can't be restored.

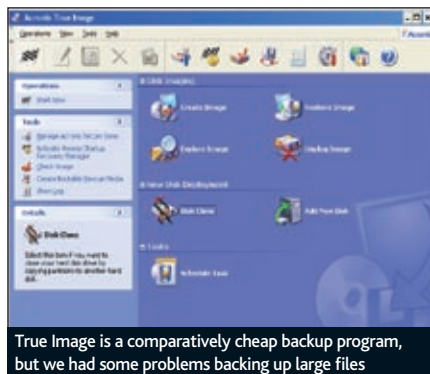
This potentially useful program would be great value if we trusted it to make safe backups. If you buy it, run plenty of manual image checks to ensure that your hardware will work with it properly.

Simon Edwards

✓ Easy-to-use disk imaging

✗ Large image files may cause problems

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or later, Pentium 133MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 20MB disk space, extra hard disk space including CD-RW, DVD-RW/DVD+RW, IDE, SATA, FireWire, USB and PC card hard disks



True Image is a comparatively cheap backup program, but we had some problems backing up large files

REVIEW PHOTO-EDITING SUITE

COREL
Paint Shop Pro X

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £99 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Corel 0800 376 9271

DETAILS www.corel.co.uk

Paint Shop Pro has always been a powerful photo-editing program, but it lacked the tidy interface design and greater ease of use of rivals such as Adobe's Photoshop Elements. The original developers, Jasc Software, always seemed oblivious to this problem, and seemed content to aim Paint Shop Pro at more experienced users who could cope with the technical complexity of the program.

Jasc was taken over by Corel last year, and this is Paint Shop Pro's first big upgrade under its new owners. We're pleased that Corel is clearly hoping to attract more first-time users with this upgrade; Paint Shop Pro X has several interface improvements and quick-fix tools that allow less-experienced users to get started more easily.

Things get off to a tiresome start, though, with an installer program that forces you to install each component separately. In addition to the main editing program, you can also install Corel's Photo Album software to manage your photo collection, a set of video tutorials, a program called BookMaker that lets you create photo albums that can be sent to online printing services and a utility called RawShooter for capturing and manipulating data from digital cameras. RawShooter is particularly annoying, as it forces you to register online – and provide your email address – before you can use it.

Once you're past the initial installation process, however, Paint Shop Pro X proves to be a very attractive upgrade. The most obvious improvement is the improved Learning Centre palette, which sits on the left-hand side of the main workspace. Originally introduced in version 9, the Learning Centre has been enhanced to provide more detailed help for performing many common editing tasks, such as cropping and

straightening photos, using special effects and adjusting colour balance, brightness and contrast.

When you select a task in the Learning Centre, the relevant tools are selected automatically, so you don't have to look through toolbars or menus to find the tool you need. Step-by-step hints on how to use each tool are also displayed in the Learning Centre to help you along.

Many of the program's new tools provide quick-fix options, allowing you to perform complex tasks quickly and easily. The Smart Photo Fix tool will automatically correct brightness, shadows, highlights and even focus problems all at once, and there are similar options for removing camera noise and grain and sharpening images.

There are also three interesting new makeover tools. The Toothbrush allows you to click on someone's teeth and automatically whiten them, while the Blemish Fixer can be used to paint out wrinkles and other skin blemishes. There's even a new Suntan tool that can apply a bit of colour to pale skin, making it look tanned.

The Photo Album program that is bundled with Paint Shop Pro saves time by automatically downloading photos from a camera or memory card as soon as it's connected to the PC. We also like the ability to create trays of photos that you group together and store at the bottom of the screen for easy access.

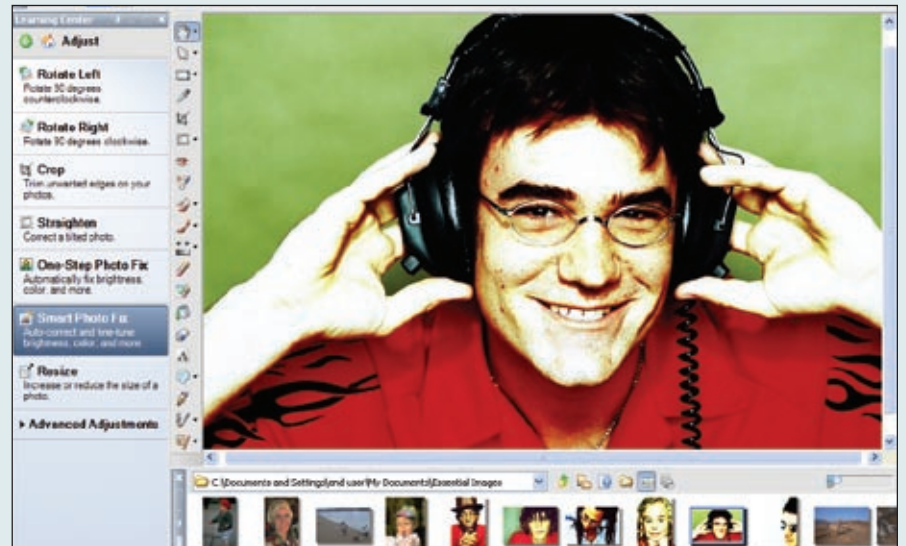
Corel has clearly identified Paint Shop Pro's main weaknesses and set out to address them, as this upgrade is much easier to use and more accessible for photo-editing novices. Our only criticism is that, at £99, Paint Shop Pro X is still £30 more expensive than Photoshop Elements. While Corel is taking Paint Shop in the right direction, a hefty price cut is necessary if it's serious about going head to head with Photoshop Elements.

Cliff Joseph

✓ Improved Learning Centre and quick-fix editing tools make this upgrade much easier to use

✗ Cumbersome installation process; price higher than most consumer-oriented competitors

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 500MB disk space, internet connection to register online



Paint Shop Pro X includes several 'quick fix' tools that make it easy to edit and adjust your digital photos